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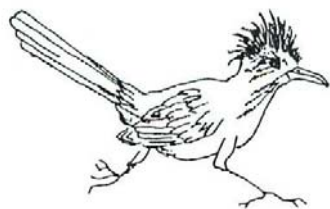
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Season 2, Volume 1

Big Bend National Park's Volunteer Newsletter

December 5, 2002



Happy Holidays to all the volunteers who are working to help Big Bend National Park enjoy another successful season.

Persimmon Gap

Mark Kirtley- Interpretation

Joan and Jack Lamkin- Visitor Center

Castolon

LeRoy and Carolyn Kellar- Interpretation

Samantha Schroeder and Whit Hubbard- Camp Hosts and Backcountry

Rio Grande Village

Hal & Margaret Waters- RGV VC

Wayne Strevel & Jennifer Dyer- RGV VC

Barbara and Bill Baldwin- Camp Hosts

Royann and Royce Brockett- Camp Hosts

Erv and Sam Drabek- RGV Backcountry

Basin

Ginny and Jim Herrick- Visitor Center

Carol and Bob Schemm- Camp Hosts

SCA's

Diane Stout- PJ Interpretation

Robin Liu- PJ Interpretation

Holly Aloï- PJ Interpretation

Maria Lavender- PJ Interpretation

River District

Steve McAllister- River District BC

Carol and Bob Huber- Backcountry

Panther Junction

Becky Reiger- Volunteer Coordinator Assistant

Fran and Bernie Heyman- Interpretation

Bud Frankenberger- Resource Management



**Fall
2002
Training
Trip
To the
South
Rim**

A trip to the South Rim is the highlight of every training. 8 new volunteers & 2 new seasonals enjoyed learning plant identification from Joe Sirotnak, PB, Trail Maintenance from Eric Walker, & backcountry issues from Angelina.



Volunteer Corner



BIG BEND VOLUNTEERS HONORED!

Erv and Sam Drabek, a familiar sight in the RGV backcountry, have recently been named as Volunteers of the Year for the Eastern Region by the US Forest Service for the year 2002. After attending the reception and awards ceremony in Milwaukee on Dec. 4th and 5th, they will return to their volunteer duties in the Boquillas District Area for their second year. After working as campground hosts in RGV last year they are excited to be working in the backcountry this season.

Married for 14 years, Erv and Sam have been fulltime RVer's for 3 years now. In their former lives, Sam worked as a Medical Technician and Erv spent 14 years as a Chicago Police Officer. Prior to retirement, they arranged their job schedules so that they worked 3 days a week and had time to be out in the wilderness the other 4 days. They started their volunteer careers with the US Forest Service in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in the Ottawa National Forest over 10 years ago. Because they were good at their jobs and loved what they were doing, they were in a position to take advantage when the opportunity arose for special training and education. Erv has become a Master of Leave No Trace. They have studied Bird biology, learned Mammal tracking, attended National Wilderness Leadership Training, and received recognition for Frog and Toad Identification. If we are lucky, we might hear Erv do his wolf call some night.

This award is not the first time Erv and Sam have been recognized. In 1997, they were recipients of the National Wilderness Ranger Volunteer of the Year award from the Chief of the USFS. They have also received an award for saving the

lives of two unfortunate people who flipped their canoe in the freezing waters in northern Michigan. Sam's medical experience became crucial in that situation.

Their first NPS experience was in Zion National Park from October 2001 until January 2002. In February, they made their first trip to Big Bend National Park. The desert, although quite different from the northern Michigan forests, has found a place in their hearts and lives. As a plus to this year's job, both of them had lots of previous experience with horses. Sam raised and cared for horses while owning and running a farm. In fact that's how they met. Erv arranged to keep his horses at Sam's farm when he wasn't riding them in Rodeos. They are also avid canoeists, a skill they don't use much in their current job here at BB. Those skills were used in the winter of 2000 during their work as Wilderness River Rangers in the Ocala National Forest in Florida. Sam experienced a sudden fright when her canoe bumped the bank where an alligator was sleeping. The alligator may have been more frightened than Sam as it scrambled across her lap in its hurry to the water!

When asked what advice they could give to those of us that are new or nearly new to volunteering, they were in agreement that a willingness to work is essential. Take any job to get your foot in the door. Even the perfect job is not always easy. Banding Bald Eagles requires very early hours. Tracking black bears and finding their habitats is not always done in perfect weather. Erv once climbed part way into a cave that was thought to be uninhabited. Imagine his surprise when his flashlight illuminated the face of a mother bear and her cub not much more than a foot away!

Between the two of them, they have 5 children ranging in age from 43 to 27, residing from Alaska to North Carolina. They have ample opportunities to visit them between volunteer jobs. Since retirement they now spend more than 11 months in their volunteer endeavors. Even though they have been offered full time employment working with biologists, doing bird surveys, mammal tracking, and wildlife surveys, they are not ready to give up their freedom to travel and offer their volunteer services in different parts of the country. Big Bend National Park is grateful to be a recipient of some of their time.

**Congratulations
Erv and Sam**

Camper's have Interesting Animal Worries!

by Bob & Carol Schemm

We enjoy our work in National Parks. We are excited to be back for our 4th year as campground hosts at the Basin campground here in Big Bend. In the summers we volunteer at Wind Cave National Park. Through our many years as volunteers, we have listened to numerous visitor concerns about animals.

During an early morning walk through the campground at Wind Cave, a woman whispered to me "a bear slept outside our tent last night". I didn't tell her that there are no bears in the Black Hills; it might have made her vacation! Late one evening two kids came to our trailer saying "there's a bear in the tent loop". Although, I reinforced that there are no bears here, they insisted on seeing one. So I called for a patrol ranger and he instead discovered a buffalo outside the fence that encloses the campground!

Here at Big Bend National Park, where there are bears, the most common animal we hear concerns about are the skunks! A young lady camper came to our door asking what to do about a skunk that had chosen to visit her site. Our advice was to leave it alone and it would probably



return the favor, as long as no food was available. Another young family's experience was a bit more traumatic. The Father was quietly gazing at our beautiful clear night skies, when he noticed a skunk heading for the door of the tent where his wife and baby were peacefully sleeping. Fearful that it would enter the tent, he threw a rock in the skunk's direction with the intention of scaring the skunk away. Unfortunately the rock hit the skunk and the rest is history! The family changed sites and spent the rest of the night in their car.

SCA's begin to present interpretive programs



EEK!
Tarantulas!



SCA Diane Stout educates and entertains the visitors

The time spent researching and preparing a guided nature walk is evident in the presentation. All the park's visitors attending Diane's talk on November 27th learned a great deal about this misunderstood creature. "EEK! Tarantula's is my first *ever* guided hike, and I am enjoying interpretation much more than I had expected", Diane stated after the hike. Adults and children alike roamed the desert looking for vertical burrows. "I love working with the visitors, interpreting one of the most commonly misunderstood creatures...tarantulas!" This program is as much fun as it is informative.





**Let me
introduce
myself**

I feel extremely fortunate to be here in Big Bend National Park for the 1st time and to be able to get to know each of you in my endeavor to put together this volunteer newsletter! I was born and raised in Oklahoma City, escaping to live in Texas for several years, then returning to OKC to live. I had always heard of Big Bend and always wanted to come here. However, as you know, it's not on the way anywhere! It took my becoming a full-time RVer almost 2 years ago to allow me the opportunity to finally make it here.

My black cat, C'Nedra, and I travel alone in our 26ft Travel Trailer that we call "Trailette". Our first "working" experience took place last summer in northern Utah for a company that managed campgrounds in the Uinta National Forest. When I used to tent camp, I remember meeting volunteers working in the National Parks. I thought that what they were doing looked like the dream life - and now I'm living it!

My previous work experience was in the financial industry with Smith Barney. Then running my own home based business with Creative Memories, I realized that, if I set my mind to it, I can learn anything. I also know that I don't want to go back to the "corporate" world! I am honored to be able to offer my services in whatever capacity is needed. I am excited about getting to know all of you as we compile this monthly newsletter. My hope is that this will be a sharing experience for all of us.

VIP Becky Reiger

NEEDED: Articles about your background, projects you are working on, or interesting stories about your volunteer experience.

Please contact your editor, Becky Reiger, at 477-1195 in Angelina Yost's office.

Activities & Events

December Potluck Dinner - Dec. 8,
6:00pm San Vincente Gym

Holiday Auction - Dec. 10, 6:30pm
PJ Community Room

Big Bend Christmas Cookie Swap -
Dec. 15, 2:00pm bring a
dozen cookies and take home
a variety! Van Inwagen
Residence @ RGV

Holiday Dinner - Dec. 17, 5:30pm
Don't forget to sign up!

Cookbook Sales - *A Taste of Big
Bend, Potluck Favorites* - a
great gift idea!

Ongoing:

Yoga - Alternate Monday's, Dec. 2 &
16, San Vicente school gym,
6:30-7:30 pm, \$10/session

Crafts - Every Monday, PJ Community
Room, 7:00 pm

**Check the Bulletin Board at PJ
for Details and Updates!**



The ZOO

Thanksgiving was a very busy time for backcountry permits! Holly Alois helps these visitors plan so they will enjoy their stay.

Volunteer Notes

The Holiday Season is exciting and festive, but it can sometimes be stressful, and possibly lonely for those of us far away from our family and friends. As Volunteers we are doing what we choose to do and love doing it. That doesn't mean that every day we enjoy every minute! Some days we don't feel our best, or maybe something happened that put a damper on our spirit. Remember during "questionable" moments, that the visitors to Big Bend National Park are excited to come here, may have planned and looked forward to this for an entire year. Our most important job is to help make their experience as fun and safe as possible for them!